SERMON

COMPOSED FOR

THE LATE FAST-DAY,

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A SERMON.

ISAIAH, Chap. lv. 6, 7.

Seek ye the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near. Let the wicked forſake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, and he will abundantly pardon.

THESE words contain the ſolemn call of God himſelf, ſpeaking by his inſpired Prophet, to a nation whoſe provocations had been almoſt continually great; which, notwithſtanding, we find God would have ſaved, if they would have hearkened to his voice, and received his inſtruction. They continued, however, obſtinate to the laſt; and perſiſting in their ſins, received the puniſhment which God, as their moral Governor, was obliged to inflict. Their enemies came upon them in a torrent, irreſiſtible by any power of their own; and having forſaken God, they were forſaken by him, and were led captives, themſelves, their wives, and children, into a far diſtant land, where they long groaned beneath the bitter oppreſſion of foreign ſervitude.

In this dealing of Almighty God with his peculiar people, we have a leſſon, if we want not wiſdom to profit by it, of the higheſt importance to ourſelves. He does not, indeed, ſpeak to us at preſent by the audible voice of a ſpecially-deputed Meſſenger; but he has ſufficiently informed us in

his word, that *he loveth righteouſneſs, and hateth iniquity*; that the one is the object of his tender regard, the other of his fierceſt indignation. If he has not ſpoke to us by an articulate voice, his meſſage has been proclaimed in a much more alarming manner—in the din and tumult of war, and in the clamours and animoſities of conflicting parties among ourſelves. The whole ſtate of our national affairs has given us abundant reaſon to fear that he is at this time preparing to viſit for our iniquities.

Our ſummons to *ſeek the Lord*, and to *call upon him*, has been loud and long continued: Can we honeſtly affirm that it has been duly attended to? It ought to be well conſidered, I mean not as a reaſon of deſpair, but as a motive for immediate exertion, that the Lord may be ſought, when it is too late, and called upon when he is too far off. There are degrees of national corruption in which he will not be found, in which no call of ſuffering ſinners will reach his ears. In the words of the text the Prophet plainly ſuppoſes ſuch a caſe as poſſible; and ſurely it highly behoves us to beſtir ourſelves betimes, to riſe and to be doing, that our day of grace and mercy may not fatally elapſe. In proportion as this danger threatens us, the neceſſity of a ſpeedy repentance will be more apparent. The longer national reformation is deferred, the greater the probability becomes that it will not be accepted. What God has promiſed, he will aſſuredly make good; but when a promiſe is conditional, the refuſal of the condition is the releaſe of the promiſer. God will then be at liberty to vindicate his laws by ſuch a meaſure of correction as may be effectual, if the exigence of the caſe require even by cutting off and caſting away.

Thus

Thus therefore it appears that the mercy ſo graciouſly promiſed to the *wicked*, who *forſakes his way*, and the *abundant pardon to the unrighteous man upon the forſaking of his thoughts*, may be forfeited by too long delay. But the ſpeedineſs is not more neceſſary than the ſincerity of repentance, which cannot be without an actual forſaking of that way and thoſe thoughts which are diſpleaſing to the Almighty. If it be delayed, repentance may come too late; if it be not ſincere, it is no repentance at all. It is, in fact, an aggravation of former ſins; the making *ſin exceeding ſinful* by an hypocritical pretence of deteſting and forſaking it. God, who *ſearcheth the heart*, has Hypocriſy in peculiar abomination; he has declared that *the Hypocrite's hope ſhall periſh*.

It is unneceſſary, I truſt, in this congregation, to refute an impious and fanciful opinion (which ſome men have taken up) as if Almighty God interfered not in the diſpoſal of worldly events, but left them all to the influence of natural cauſes, and the operation of human counſels. I will, however, be free to ſay, that ſuch an opinion is not Chriſtian; that it is directly oppoſite to what the Goſpel teaches concerning God and his providence; that it is contrary to the hiſtory of God's proceedings with all the incorrigibly corrupted nations of antiquity, upon all of whom his judicial ſentence of extirpation was finally executed. He who holds ſuch an opinion, has no buſineſs in this aſſembly, and I will affront no man by ſuppoſing that he came hither without convictions, which alone can juſtify his appearing among us. If God is an unconcerned ſpectator of the fate of empires, if we are really left to our own arm and our own counſels, ſo over-matched and baffled as we have hitherto found ourſelves, our proſpects are com-

fortleſs indeed. *But the race is not to the ſwift, nor the battle to the ſtrong*; without God we can do nothing, and with him nothing is impoſſible. *He ſpeaketh, and it is done; he commandeth, and it ſtandeth faſt.*

The great queſtion, therefore, is briefly this: How ſhall we make God our friend? And the anſwer is equally ſhort; *Fear him, and keep his commandments.* Have we done this? that is, have we done it honeſtly, ſteadily, and cordially? If anſwer be made in the affirmative, I am afraid that our ſituation is very unpromiſing; there can be little hope that *God will be intreated of us.* On the ſuppoſition that we have already ſincerely repented, the great remedy has been applied, and ſucceſs has not followed. The ſtorm ſtill threatens on all ſides, and frowns with increaſing horrors. From year to year it has been gathering, and there is not the ſmalleſt appearance that it will paſs away.

On the contrary, if all this is nothing more than a gracious warning of God's diſpleaſure at our ſins; if his patient long-ſuffering is ſtill waiting; if he is ſtill willing to open our ears, and prepare our hearts for inſtruction, all may at laſt be well. The moſt terrifying ſymptom of paſt times will afford the trueſt conſolation with reſpect to that which is now approaching. The remedy is ſtill in our hand, which we may uſe when we pleaſe. If we truly and timely *ſeek the Lord, he will abundantly pardon.* He is not only *great to deſtroy*, he is equally *mighty to ſave*; and it is ſurely worth our while to make the experiment. Till we fulfil the condition by ſincerely returning to him, we have no right to his friendſhip and protection. He may be *faithful who has promiſed*, but the promiſe will avail us nothing, if we be unfaithful to ourſelves.

We

We have faſted indeed repeatedly; we have confeſſed our ſins, and outwardly deprecated the Divine wrath. But repentance is ſomething more than faſting, and praying, and confeſſing ſins. It muſt ſettle in the heart, and influence the whole deportment. Abſtaining from a meal, or changing one ſort of viand for another, is of no account in the ſight of God, who has told us, that *That which defileth a man, goeth not in at the mouth, but proceedeth forth from the heart.* The frame and diſpoſition of the heart alone will acquit or condemn us.

In a ſerious moment a man may pray; he may confeſs and lament his ſins. But a moment is a ſmall portion of a whole life; and weighed againſt a whole life which diſplays little elſe than the fruits of an evil heart, it is nothing. What fruits of a contrary kind have been produced among us? God has not failed to warn and to chaſtiſe us; his hand is ſtill lifted up, and the ſtroke ſeems not unlikely to fall with a ſeverity that may confound, if not deſtroy us.

By all this diſcipline of heaven, I aſk again, How have we been benefited? What has been the effect, and where is the amendment? Does it appear in the purity, ſobriety, and ſerioufneſs of the public manners? In the ſteady diſcharge of our relative duties to each other, or of our religious duties towards God? Are the moſt infamous vices diſcountenanced; rather, are they not cultivated with a kind of enthuſiaſtic eagerneſs?

It will not ſurely be denied that the clamours of riot, obſcenity, drunkenneſs, and every kind of profligate diſſipation, reſound in every place, and propagate their deadly infection without controul and without rebuke. Vice is no longer aſhamed to appear in its ugliеſt forms; and he is now the man

man of ſpirit who is moſt audaciouſly wicked. Who ſees not that the gangrene is pervading every rank and every age? The hoary head has, in a great meaſure, loſt its gravity, which heretofore ſet examples, and read leſſons of virtue and prudence to the young; and the youth of both ſexes that modeſty and ſweet baſhfulneſs of ſentiment and look, which at the ſame time diſpoſed their own hearts to the ſtricteſt purity of manners, and operated like a charm to make ſimilar impreſſions on the beholder. How their place is occupied is too notorious to need deſcription.

All this, with every other evil work, which is ſeen ſo generally to abound, is the diſmal effect of a ſingle cauſe; and while the cauſe remains, the effect will never be removed. This cauſe is an abſolute want of religious principles, in which a great part of the preſent generation has grown up, to the infinite reproach, as well as infinite danger of our country. Among a very great number, and thoſe of the greateſt influence from their eminence of fortune and authority, religion is become a jeſt; and he who ſtill retains ſome reverence of God, or expreſſes any ſolicitude about a future account, is pointed out and ridiculed as an unſociable mortal, who, in the ſcrupulous ignorance of former ages, might have lived with reſpect, but whom the free ſpirit and informed minds of theſe times can by no means tolerate.

We ſhall not wonder, therefore, if the paſſions, uncurbed by religion, like wild beaſts unchained, commit ravages and deſolation on every ſide; that avarice, ambition, ſenſuality, as the leading inclination happens to lie, finding the mind deſerted of its guard, poſſeſs it wholly, and proceed to ſuch lengths as in other circumſtances would have

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ſeemed impoſſible, or prodigious. Hence it is, that inſtead of thoſe bleſſed *fruits of the ſpirit, love, joy, peace, long-ſuffering, gentleneſs, goodneſs, meekneſs,* and *temperance*, the worſt *works of the fleſh* are every where manifeſt; *hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, ſtrife, ſeditions, envyings, murders, and revellings.* Hence it comes to paſs, that whoredoms, adulteries, the moſt unnatural impurities, are become daily articles of public intelligence; that families are daily ruined by an expence enormouſly diſproportioned to their income; that helpleſs children are continually left to the cold charity of a pariſh, while the profligate father too often pays his forfeit life to public juſtice. Of an offſpring ſo educated, it will be well if the daughters become not Proſtitutes, and the ſons Ruffians.

Reſtore the ſpirit and power of religion, and the public morals will ſoon appear with a different face. Oaths and blaſphemies will no longer make ſo large a part of our vulgar language; the liſping tongue of infancy will no longer be fluent in execrations, and the prophanation of God's awful name. Reſtore the ſpirit and power of religion, and the parent will teach his offſpring better leſſons; they will hear from him the language of ſoberneſs, benevolence, and piety, and are equally apt to imitate good and evil.

To the ſame cauſe is to be imputed, what, I am free to confeſs, appears to me no ſmall aggravation of the national iniquity; to be indeed, in ſome degree, as it were, the filling up of our meaſure. I mean the general unwillingneſs that appears to humble ourſelves beneath the hand of God; in conſequence of which the public danger, and its attendant calamities, which lie ſo heavy on individuals, are borne not as they would be, if religion

gion had due influence on our hearts, but with a ſort of ſour and reluctant turbulence, far different from that patient enduring which the true Chriſtian would have imbibed from an attentive ſtudy of the Goſpel.

This, it may be ſaid, is a ſhocking picture. I meaned not, however, to exaggerate any one feature. However comfortleſs it may ſeem, it is fully juſtified by public appearances, and it fully juſtifies God's dealing with us. If God is a moral Governor, it is hardly poſſible to ſuppoſe that he would overlook profligacy ſo complicated and enormous. But *in the midſt of judgement he remembereth mercy*, and chaſteneth with the moſt gracious deſign. Let us hearken to his voice; his promiſe of forgiveneſs is limited by only one condition. *Let the wicked forſake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, and he will abundantly pardon.* A general reformation will be the ſureſt means to ſave the nation from the hand of a perfidious invader; a particular reformation will bring individuals to the bleſſed aſylum of life and immortality in the kingdom of heaven.

Here is ſufficient encouragement for our ſtrenuous endeavours. At our utmoſt peril, the religious principle, which in one part of our people is ſwallowed up in avowed infidelity, and in another, where it is diſtinguiſhable at all, is cold and lifeleſs, muſt be reſtored and revived. This has not yet been generally attempted. Turn your thoughts back, I beſeech you, to occurrences which aroſe within a few months. Perhaps never was the nation in ſo extreme danger. The united fleets of our natural enemies rode triumphant in our ſeas. Every poſt announced the great probability

bility of a powerful invaſion, which muſt have occaſioned great confuſion and much blood-ſhed, if it had not ended in our political diſſolution. Every poſt at the ſame time contained crouded advertiſements of public diverſions, and the meetings were full, and riotous, and diſſolute. The ſenſe of the moſt alarming public danger was ſunk in the ſpirit of diſſipation. Our religion, laws, lives, liberty, were all at ſtake; but religion, laws, lives, and liberty were nothing to thoſe whoſe God is their pleaſure, and who can reliſh nothing elſe.

Our danger, is little, if at all, abated at this day; yet appearances with reſpect to our moral conduct continue the ſame; and they never will be better, except the religious principle can be effectually recovered. When that happens, a great part of the national danger will vaniſh. We ſhall be better men, better citizens, and better ſoldiers; we ſhall learn the neceſſity of peaceable ſubordination, of reverence for Government, and ſubmiſſion to the laws; we ſhall underſtand the value of our excellent and envied conſtitution, and ſee our duty to defend it at almoſt any riſk. Above all, we ſhall have reaſon to truſt in the favour and protection of God, in whoſe *hand there is power and might, ſo that none is able to withſtand him.*

If you aſk, how is this great principle to be recovered, I will tell you honeſtly. Every man muſt do it for himſelf. Every man has, or may have, the written word of God; he may read it, and inform himſelf of his whole duty. He may learn for himſelf to be ſerious, pious, benevolent, humble, chaſte, and temperate; he may call his children and his ſervants to public devotion and inſtruction; he may call them about him at his leiſure hours, and on the Lord's day, and infuſe into them the

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ſame ſpirit which he will find ſo comfortable to himſelf; he may introduce the good cuſtom of family devotion, which would ſoon inſpire into them an habitual reverence of God, and without which there is danger that God will be abſolutely forgotten.

With minds ſo tinctured, the young members of his family will hardly grow up into wicked men and women. They will naturally grow up into ſuch as will delight his heart; ſuch as will be happy here, and God will bleſs in the world to come. Thus he and they together will learn the ineſtimable price of religion, and will be loth to exchange its preſent joys, and future hopes, the rapturous conſciouſneſs of a pious heart in this world, and life and immortality in the next, for thoſe ſenſual and ſordid gratifications which have ſo general a vogue in the preſent low eſtimation of ſpiritual attainments.

If you ſay that you are ſimple and private men; that tho' you ſhould take meaſures for your own inſtruction and improvement, yet your influence cannot be extenſive, nor your numbers bear any proportion to the vaſt multitudes of a populous nation; if you ſhould thus excuſe yourſelves, I would wiſh to remind you, that you know not what it may pleaſe God to do for the ſake of a few good men. When he found it neceſſary to deſtroy Sodom, becauſe *the cry* of its inhabitants *was great, and their ſin very grievous*, he would have ſpared that ſinful city for the ſake of ten righteous, and actually ſaved Zoar for the ſake of righteous Lot. Why, therefore, may he not ſpare our nation for the ſake of a few who fear him, and whom he loves?

But

But this is not all. If reformation begin at all, it muſt begin with individuals. The ſins of the nation are the accumulated ſins of particular perſons; and in proportion as particular perſons reform, the accumulation is diminiſhed.

I would ſay farther, that he who reforms himſelf, and thoſe under his immediate controul or influence, be they more or fewer, does all that God requires of him; that the religion of Jeſus Chriſt is particularly calculated for the poor, for men of humble birth and private education; and wherever it flouriſhes with any conſiderable effect, it will flouriſh among theſe. Theſe are the bulk of every nation, and we may be aſſured that, where theſe are good Chriſtians, God will not involve them in the puniſhment of thoſe whom rank and opulence have irretrievably corrupted. It is probable to conjecture that even the rich and great would not obſerve the Chriſtian converſation of a virtuous commonalty without improvement; at leaſt their iniquities would ſhew a face leſs bold, if they knew that their example would be abhorred, and themſelves deſpiſed by a majority reſpectable for their numbers, as well as for the gravity and regularity of their deportment. Virtue even in the loweſt ranks is venerable and awful, and, if it were general, would effectually diſcountenance a few who neither fear God, nor reſpect themſelves.

I have ſpoken with much plainneſs, but not more than ſeems juſtified by the occaſion. If I have ſpoken with effect, I ſhall conſider this as the happieſt day of my life, and ſhall be thankful to God for bringing me to it. Nevertheleſs you will not underſtand more than I mean, as if I thought that *God will certainly be avenged on ſuch a nation as this.* Our moral and religious affairs are doubtleſs in deplorable diſorder; but

but God's chaſtiſements for national offences may be very ſevere, without proceeding to extremity. National reformation may make us proper objects of his mercy, and place us once more under his protection. I am convinced that there is a root of religion among us, which, if it be duly watered, may bring forth the happieſt fruits.

We can eſtimate the proportion of national virtue and vice by appearances alone; and here vice has greatly the advantage. It is forward, loud, and boiſterous, and forces itſelf into notice. Virtue, on the contrary, is modeſt, ſecret, and ſilent; contented with the conſciouſneſs of heaven and itſelf, it does not officiouſly court obſervation. There may therefore poſſibly be more of the latter than is generally remarked. It is our great intereſt that it ſhould be ſo, and our greateſt conſolation to believe ſo. And, indeed, I hope and truſt that our *whole head is not yet ſick, or our whole heart faint*; that we have *our ſeven thouſands who have not bowed the knee to Baal*, and therefore that God may yet *be intreated of us and heal us*; that for their ſake, and by their means, *he may turn and repent, and leave a bleſſing behind him.*

But be this as it may, it will be no leſs our duty to add ourſelves to the number of the good. This will ſtrengthen our cauſe and increaſe our hope; it will be an additional ſecurity of the Almighty's powerful aſſiſtance, without which the ſtrength and wiſdom of man are vain.

I have purpoſely avoided all political diſcuſſions. Except ſo far as they may be connected with religion, they ſeem to me unſuitable to this place, and the character in which I am now ſpeaking; nor can they well be introduced, when the views and principles of jarring parties are to be the ſubject,

ject, without raiſing ſentiments incompatible with the deſign of a Chriſtian aſſembly, humbling themſelves on ſo awful an occaſion. Nevertheleſs it will not be improper to ſet before you a ſhort view of our real ſituation.

We are engaged in an unequal and unfortunate war, unaſſiſted by allies, not only deprived of, but attacked by a large proportion of our own original ſtrength, the planting and nurturing of which have coſt the nation many millions of treaſure, and the blood of many thouſands of our braveſt countrymen. This ſtrength is now firmly leagued with other enemies, numerous, powerful, and malicious; our public meaſures have hitherto been generally unſucceſsful; diviſions and diſcontents among ourſelves have weakened the exertions of Government, and are at this time aſſuming appearances, which, however they may end, are, in my apprehenſion, exceedingly formidable.

Thus we ſtand ſurrounded with terrors on all ſides, and who ſhall look at the precipice without feeling the ſtrongeſt impulſes in his heart to addreſs his fervent petitions to the great "Setter Up and Plucker Down of Kings" and kingdoms? In thee, O Lord, is all our hope and confidence. We are unable to ſave ourſelves; in thee is all our ſafety. Accept, we beſeech thee, our ſervice of this day; look with pity on our contrition, and give ſincerity to our repentance, that ſo we *may be ſaved from our enemies, and from the hand of them that hate us.* Put a ſpirit of unanimity and true patriotiſm into the hearts of our people of every degree; inſpire into them a patient ſubmiſſion to the calamities of the times, and give wiſdom to the counſels, and vigour to the exertions of our Government. Deliver us not up to be torn in pieces by

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our own fury. Diſpoſe our antient and natural enemies to renounce their treacherous dealing; or, if they continue obſtinate in their unprovoked malice, fortify the hearts, and nerve the hands of our armies by ſea and land, and lead them to victory in the day of battle. For our ſons and brethren of America, make them underſtand, ere it be too late for their and our ſalvation, that civil and religious liberty, for which they have ſo paſſionate an affection, cannot flouriſh under the baleful ſhade of Gallic deſpotiſm and Popiſh ſuperſtition. Heal all diviſions and animoſities between us, and incline both parties to forgive, and to accept forgiveneſs; and upon terms, ſuch as it may become Freemen to propoſe, and Freemen to approve, unite us again by an honourable, cordial, and indiſſoluble reconciliation. Thou who haſt ſo often and marvelouſly interpoſed in times paſt to deliver this nation and true religion from the jaw of the Lion, from the cruel vengeance of Idolatrous perſecutors, rouze thyſelf again, and ſave thy Proteſtant people of Britain and America; continue the pure light of the Goſpel to them and their poſterity, that they may praiſe thee for thy loving-kindneſs, and worſhip Thee for ever in ſpirit and in truth. To this my brethren, let us all cordially ſay, AMEN.

THE END.